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SECRET

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Central Intelligence Bulletin

CONTENTS

SOUTH VIETNAM: Ky and Big Minh said to be discussing broad opposition front. (Page 1)

PAKISTAN: Government's latest moves unlikely to ease split between two wings. (Page 2)

MALTA-UK: Agreement on steps toward a new defense arrangement. (Page 3)

UN-JORDAN: Problems in UN refugee assistance. (Page 5)

GABON: Murder of President's main tribal opponent. (Page 6)

IAEA-EURATOM: Negotiations on safeguards (Page 7)

GUYANA: ALCAN offer (Page 7)

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

SOUTH VIETNAM: Vice President Ky and Big Minh are said to be discussing the formation of a broad opposition front against President Thieu.

Minh met with Ky last weekend [redacted]

[redacted] and showed interest in the vice president's plan for a "United National Front" of all opposition groups. While Minh refused to give a firm commitment of support, he said he was ready to oppose Thieu actively and to work closely with Ky.

Although Minh has been reluctant to join in opposition activities since his withdrawal from the presidential election last month, he may have decided that with overt opposition growing, he should try to play an important role as an active antigovernment leader.

Rivalries among Ky, Minh, and other opposition leaders could hamper the development of an opposition front; such rivalries have blocked the creation of similar coalitions in the past. Nevertheless, Minh could bring into an opposition organization some elements that probably would not join with Ky by themselves.

Ky hopes his front would be able to coordinate activities by all opposition groups against Thieu, with its first goal to force cancellation of the presidential election on 3 October by large-scale demonstrations. The vice president has also been discussing his plans with other antigovernment groups.

If these diverse opposition interests do begin to cooperate with one another, the political threat to the Thieu government would be significantly increased.

21 Sep 71

Central Intelligence Bulletin

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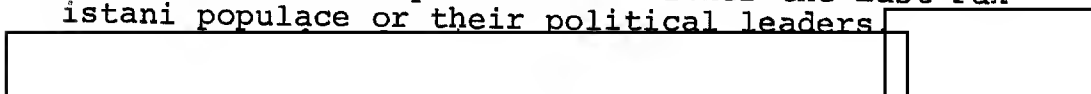
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PAKISTAN: Islamabad continues to take steps to increase the role of civilians in governing the country, but its efforts are unlikely to improve the prospects for reconciliation between Pakistan's two wings.

The military government has announced that by-elections will be held from 25 November - 9 December to fill East Pakistan's vacant seats in the national and provincial assemblies. President Yahya Khan has also agreed that the new constitution to be drawn up by the government will be submitted to the national assembly for its consideration before being proclaimed by the executive branch. These two new measures follow the appointment on 17 September of a civilian cabinet to administer East Pakistan.

The new procedures for approval of the constitution leave Yahya with a veto power over changes recommended by the assembly. Moreover, if the assembly fails to put forward its suggestions within 90 days, the government's draft automatically becomes final.

The seats being filled in the by-elections became vacant last month when Pakistan's military rulers disqualified 79 of the 167 Awami Leaguers elected to the National Assembly and 195 of the League's 288 provincial assembly members. In addition to the large percentage of disqualified members, many of the "acceptable" legislators are likely to decline to take their seats. These developments, together with the limitations on the national assembly's constitution-making role and the unimpressive composition of East Pakistan's new cabinet, leave little chance that Yahya's latest moves will make much of an impression on either the East Pakistani populace or their political leaders.



25X1
21 Sep 71

Central Intelligence Bulletin

25X1
2

SECRET

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MALTA-UK: London and Valletta have agreed on the procedures and timetable for negotiating a new defense arrangement.

Prime Ministers Heath and Mintoff, in talks last weekend in London, agreed that financial terms should be worked out within three months and a detailed agreement completed within six months. Mintoff by implication accepted the NATO cash-aid offer, which the British hope will rise to \$24 million, on the understanding that bilateral project aid from individual NATO countries would be negotiated promptly. London promised to pay half of the annual UK-NATO package by 30 September, assuming that NATO approves these arrangements.

Mintoff agreed to lift restrictions placed on British forces on Malta and to restore the previous arrangements--which gave London a veto over third-country military use of Malta's airfields and harbors--pending completion of a new agreement. The Maltese leader on 8 September had ordered a halt to the distribution of "duty-free fuel" to the British forces on Malta.

Mintoff told Heath that regular visits of the US Sixth Fleet would be acceptable, but with the clear understanding that "very occasional" courtesy visits by Soviet naval forces would be required to maintain the island's neutrality. Malta suspended Sixth Fleet visits in late June. According to Mintoff, the Malta drydocks are being converted to commercial use and will not be suitable in the future for handling naval vessels.

Mintoff apparently has decided that a continuation of tough bargaining tactics would not result in a bigger Western offer. He also was probably impelled toward a settlement with the UK by his concern over the possible quid pro quo that Libya or the USSR might ask in return for substantial aid, and by his realization that the Maltese remain basically pro-European. He doubtless will concentrate now on striking the best bargain possible in bilateral aid negotiations with individual NATO countries.

25X1
25X1

21 Sep 71

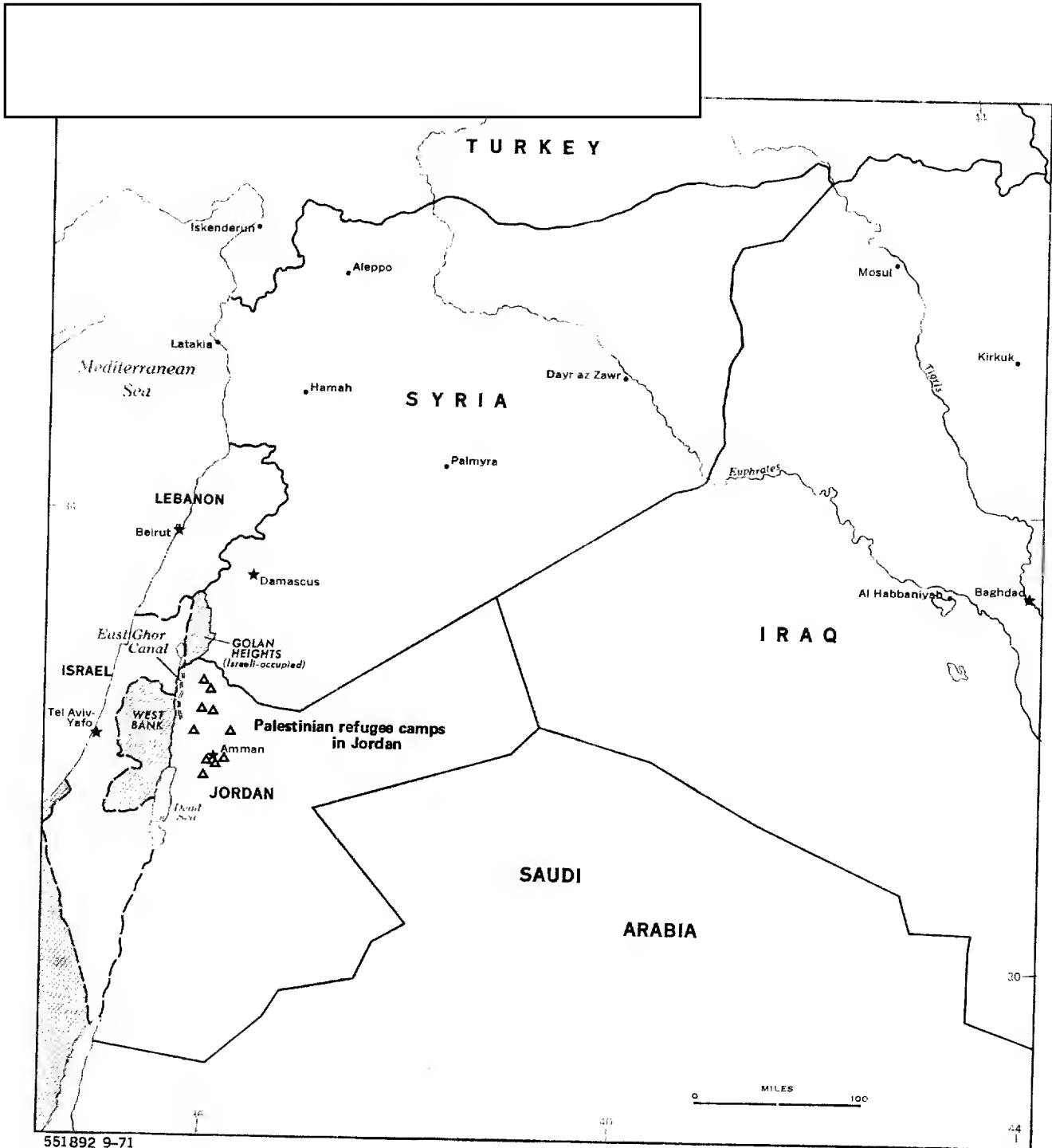
Central Intelligence Bulletin

3

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25X1



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UN-JORDAN: Two new problems are hindering the refugee assistance efforts of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Jordan.

Syria's protracted closure of its border with Jordan has put severe strains on UNRWA's effort to provide adequate supplies, which generally arrive at Lebanese ports for overland transshipment. Damascus recently "relented" and allowed UNRWA to ship via a roundabout route through Iraq, thus adding more than 550 miles to the trip. UNRWA officials believe the refugees' flour supplies will run out this week, for at least a short period, and have alerted Jordanian security personnel to the potential for trouble. Flour is essential to the refugees' diet and is also used by them to barter for other necessities of life.

Meanwhile, UNRWA remains beset by its own fiscal crisis. With US support, it had hoped to convince Amman to take over some of UNRWA's services in the refugee areas. An opportunity to do this seemed possible this summer in connection with the substantial movement of refugees from the Jordanian plateau into the East Ghor valley. Jordan, however, refused to take over any programs, and in fact asked UNRWA to provide assistance in the valley. Amman maintained that UNRWA could do this without increasing costs, since some refugee camps on the plateau could be closed.

The fiscal crisis has permitted UNRWA to supply only food in East Ghor, and a number of refugee families have now returned to the plateau, where they can obtain UNRWA's educational and medical services. This development has increased the refugee camp population and the potential for another explosive situation. The camps on the plateau have provided a fertile base for fedayeen recruitment. It would cost Jordan about \$400,000 to assume UNRWA's functions in East Ghor and induce perhaps 30,000-40,000 refugees to settle there.

21 Sep 71

Central Intelligence Bulletin

5

~~SECRET~~

25X1

25X1

SECRET

GABON: President Bongo's main tribal opponent, Germain Mba, was murdered late last week following the recent surfacing of rumors of a tribal plot against the government.

According to the local rumor mill, Bongo had Mba assassinated after the latter--who had been in the Gabon Embassy in Bonn--refused a new diplomatic assignment and returned instead to Gabon to work against the President. The government attributes the death of Mba, who was allegedly shot by three white men, to unspecified "foreign powers" intent on disrupting Gabon's stability and progress. It has denied that Mba was killed because of his opposition activity [REDACTED]

25X1

Mba rallied to the government three years ago after unsuccessful opposition in exile, but Bongo has always suspected him of continued plotting on behalf of Gabon's largest tribe. Mba's death may give other tribal enemies of President Bongo pause, at least for the moment.

It is also possible that the US, long mistrusted by some Gabonese leaders, could become a convenient scapegoat in the affair, even though US relations with Libreville are presently good. [REDACTED]

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

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IAEA-EURATOM: Yesterday's announcement of EURATOM's decision to open safeguards negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) markedly improves the climate for ratification of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The EURATOM non-nuclear-weapon states have signed the NPT, but have not ratified it pending completion of the negotiations--expected to be lengthy--with the IAEA, the treaty-designated enforcement agency. Japan, another key state that has signed but not ratified the NPT, has said it would be willing to enter negotiations once the terms of an IAEA-EURATOM agreement are known. The EURATOM decision should give a major boost to the IAEA's campaign to complete agreements with NPT adherents; to date only two of the 69 parties to the treaty have completed safeguards negotiations.



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GUYANA: The Aluminum Company of Canada's (ALCAN) need for bauxite has caused it to offer to act as sales and shipping agent for part of the output of Guybau, the government firm now operating ALCAN's former bauxite holding. The offer, initially for a two-year period, follows settlement of outstanding compensation issues on terms satisfactory to ALCAN. Even if Guyana accepts ALCAN's offer it still would face major difficulties in marketing the remainder of the output. The company fears, however, that its operations in nearby Jamaica would be threatened by a more generous offer of assistance to Guybau. For this reason ALCAN also refused, at least temporarily, to meet Guyana's demands for technical assistance to expand calcined bauxite output.



21 Sep 71

Central Intelligence Bulletin

7

SECRET

Secret Approved For Release 2003/05/19 : CIA-RDP79T00975A020000110001-6

Secret

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